

This week in the BMJ

Paying tribute to Ireland's doctors

In the past two centuries Ireland's doctors, especially in Ulster, have faced unique challenges over those of normal practice—the famine of the 19th century and the “troubles” of the 20th century. In 1847, according to Froggatt (p 1636), 4% of all physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries in Ireland died of fever associated with the famine. No doctors have died at work during the troubles, but Froggatt describes the psychological effects of treating injuries from violence—injuries that led to a Belfast surgeon accumulating a series of cases of gun injuries to the brain surpassed only in Chicago.

On p 1609 Firth-Cozens et al show that a quarter of the doctors who treated victims of the Omagh bombing had scores diagnostic of post-traumatic stress disorder on a well validated questionnaire. Only half of them had sought help. And on p 1648 Stewart gives a personal view of providing paediatric services on the “peace line” in Belfast.

Survey provides no evidence that medical students turn cynical and unaltruistic

Medical schools have been accused of turning altruistic young people into cynics more interested in money. To test this accusation Petrie et al asked 520 Auckland medical students at various stages of the course what they would wish for if granted three wishes (p 1593). The three most popular categories of wishes were for happiness (34%), for money (32%), and altruistic wishes (31%). Rates of altruistic wishes did not vary over the course—and nor did those for money. Women were more likely to make altruistic, intimacy, and happiness wishes and men to make sexual ones.

MRI proves that Leonardo da Vinci got sexual anatomy wrong

Ever since Leonardo da Vinci drew the anatomy of human copulation, anatomists have wondered how male and female genitals interact. Schultz et al solved the issue by performing magnetic resonance imaging on couples during intercourse (p 1596). During intercourse in the “missionary position” the penis is not straight, as drawn by da Vinci, nor S shaped, as

envisaged by Dickinson, but boomerang shaped. During arousal the female uterus was raised and the anterior vaginal wall lengthened but, contrary to the findings of Masters and Johnson, the uterus was not enlarged.

Shaken martinis may be more effective antioxidants than stirred ones

Speculating on why the secret agent James Bond seems so healthy, Trevithick and colleagues tested the antioxidant properties of Bond's favourite drink—“shaken, not stirred” martinis (p 1600). They tested drinks for their ability to deactivate hydrogen peroxide and found that shaken martinis were more effective than stirred martinis and that both were more effective than gin or vermouth alone.

JAMA covers reflect inappropriate stereotypes of women

On p 1603 Clark commends the journal *JAMA* for emphasising the role of the humanities in medicine through its cover paintings, but she wondered whether these covers also conveyed other messages. She reviewed 50 consecutive covers from March 1997 and found that 34 depicted humans: 15 women, 13 men, and six subjects of mixed or unknown sex. Of these, 25 presented stereotyped sex images—women were predominantly “objects” (of desire) and men were authoritative “subjects.” Of the 15 images of women, 12 included babies and six nudity, whereas only one of the images of men included a child and none contained nudity. The author recommends a more balanced representation of women on the covers of *JAMA*.

P's predominate in published papers

In this alarmingly alliterative article a paediatric professor portrays the puzzling profusion of “p's” in published papers (p 1605). The producer of this prose proposes that this plethora has potentially progressed past the point of pleasure to perturbation. He ponders the pathogenesis of this phenomenon, postulating precursors in poetic pleasure while admitting the piskiness of the problem.